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BUILDING BRIDGES IN ROTARY

Working Paper 83-807*

by

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Abstract

Rotary International is the largest service club in the world numbering 20,000 clubs and almost a million members all of whom are business executives or professionals. The clubs, traditionally, have been administered on a divisionalized basis. This article suggests that a matrix structure might be more appropriate and describes how that structure was applied in the East Dallas Rotary Club.

Building Bridges in Rotary

We seldom think of ourselves as producers -- yet in a very deep and real sense we are. Our product is service -- service to our vocations, service to our community, service to the world. Our inputs are the talents, the time, the energy, and the resources of our members. Our task is to transform the raw materials our members offer into our finished product -- service.

We can only achieve this task if we work together; but working together implies a need for organization. Organization means two things. First, it means a structure -- a president, a secretary, a treasurer, and a board of directors. Second, it means process -- how will the officers and directors work together, when will they meet, what will they discuss? In all this we are no different from a business enterprise.

Given that our needs for organization are so similar to those of business, it is useful to press the analogy a little further and to recognize that the structure that most clubs have put in place for their organizations corresponds to that of a divisionalized company. By divisionalized I mean a company with a number of products each being produced and marketed in an identifiable segment of a company under the leadership of a divisional manager.

Consider the organizational chart of a typical club in Exhibit 1. Instead of divisional managers responsible for products, we have four directors each responsible for one of the avenues of service. The first three directors have committees reporting to them; the club service director has a much wider range of support including the magazine editor and the magazine committee, the membership committee, the fellowship committee, the program committee, and so on.

The divisional design for organizations was invented by the duPonts and Alfred Sloan of General Motors and has stood the test of time both for the

large business enterprise and for the individual Rotary club. It does have its weaknesses, however. William Coggins, chairman of Dow Corning at the time, described some of them in these words.

*Cumbersome communications channels existed between key functions...

*In the face of stiffening competition, the corporation remained too internalized in its thinking and organizational structure. It was insufficiently oriented to the outside world.

*Long-range corporate planning was sporadic and superficial...

To solve their perceived problems Dow Corning turned to the matrix concept of organization.

Most Rotarians could probably echo Mr. Coggins thoughts to a greater or lesser extent in the context of their own clubs. How many of us have not been concerned at one stage or another with "cumbersome" communication? For example, as the organizational chart stands, there is no contact between the fellowship committee and the vocational service committee except through the directors.

If the vocational committee never meets with the fellowship committee, then it is not at all easy for the two to know what the other has planned. As another example, the information committee needs to coordinate with the international service committee but neither organizational structure nor process exist for this purpose.

Are we all satisfied that our clubs are sufficiently oriented to the outside world? What about our board meetings? What proportion of our time there is devoted to the "world" and what proportion to the affairs of our club? And how much of our time, after the first few meetings of the year, is devoted to long-range planning? It is my experience that in business as well as Rotary

clubs, the problems of the day tend to press out time for thoughtful strategic planning.

If then, we can to some extent echo the thoughts of Mr. Coggins, we might find it useful to examine his proposal to use a matrix form of organization. An example of a matrix, in the context of a Rotary club appears in Exhibit 2. To simplify the diagram, only 4 club service committees are shown but clearly there would be many more in practice.

In designing the matrix, there are two essential steps that must be followed. First, we must distinguish the formulation of plans from the implementation of those plans or, equivalently, strategy from operations. Vocational service, community service, and international service are our products. Our clubs must formulate strategies for service in those three areas. Our three "external" directors in their roles as committee chairmen are responsible for this planning function -- they are our strategists.

By contrast, our club service director is really our chief operating officer with ultimate responsibility for implementing the strategies of the other three directors. As we noted earlier, service is our output; the talents of our members our input. Now we see that club service is the mechanism that transforms the one into the other. Putting it another way, the committees that report to the club service director are our "management and staff."

The second necessary step is best understood by a close examination of Exhibit 2. Each committee member in that Exhibit serves on two committees -- hence the term matrix. For example, John is a member of the international committee on the one hand but he is also a member of the information committee on the other. Paulo is a member of both the community service and the program committees. Each has a dual membership -- hence the term matrix organization.

The matrix structure does not conflict with the manual of procedure in any way. Exactly the same committees that appear in the divisional organization appear in the matrix organization. All that has happened is that each member of one committee serves on another committee and therefore automatically provides liaison between the two. Of course, it is only the committee members and not the committee chairman who double up in this way.

An example of how we applied the matrix organization in our club illustrates the concept well. We decided to organize a 10 km footrace to raise funds for a Senior Citizens Home in our area. The race was conceived as part of our community service activities and our director for Community Service was therefore ultimately responsible for this activity. The race was two years in the planning and was a very important part of our strategy for service in our club. The formulation of this strategy took place in our board meetings and under the direction of the director -- as the matrix structure suggests it should.

Once we got closer to the time, a race committee was appointed. The chairman of this committee reported to the Community Service director. The primary responsibility of this committee was to implement the board's strategy for service by organizing this race. Their tasks were many and varied including arranging for T-shirts for the participants, measuring the course, advertising, lining up corporate sponsors, and so on.

As the work proceeded the committee found that it had a second set of responsibilities which turned out to be the other side of the matrix. Information about the race had to be given to the club and a member of the information committee was co-opted onto the race committee to be a liaison agent. Another task was to ensure that details about the race were printed in weekly

bulletin. One member of the race committee was asked therefore to liaise with the bulletin editor.

One of the trustees of the Home became very interested in Rotary leading us to invite him to become a member of our club. This led to members of the race committee liaising with the membership and classification committees. We realized afterwards that we were remiss in not co-opting a member of the membership development onto the race committee.

Eventually someone on the race committee was working with the chairmen of every club service committee. The race was seen as a vehicle for deepening club fellowship; programs about the race were arranged; and so on. The result was an almost perfect application of the matrix. The race was our product; club service turned out to be our production process.

The matrix form of organization has several potential advantages. First, by focussing our directors attention on formulating strategies on how we might serve our vocations, our community, and our world, we force them to turn their eyes outside our clubs. They in turn will cause us to look outside. Second, by asking our directors to think strategically we are asking them to take a long-range view, to think beyond next week's meeting to what we as Rotarians might mean to our neighbors in a more permanent sense.

Third, we solve the problem of communication by getting each individual to serve on two committees and by so doing to take on two responsibilities. Johan, for example, will meet with Klaus, Karl, and Heinrich to formulate strategy for vocational service. He will then meet with Carl and Enrique to decide how all the strategies might be implemented in the context of membership. His role in the membership meetings is to convey the strategy of the vocational committee. His role in the vocational committee is to explain the implementation steps taken by the membership committee.

At first glance the number of meetings one might have to attend appears excessive but this is not the case. The three "outside" directors will meet with their committees on a quarterly basis. At the outset of a year these might be longer meetings but later these will simply be reviews of strategies already put into place. They will also, by virtue of being directors, meet with the board under the chairmanship of the President and in association with the officers of the club once a month.

It would probably be advisable for the chairman of the various operational committees to meet together monthly too. These "management" meetings could place at the same time as the board meeting and ideally should be presided over by the chief operating officer namely the club service director. The various operational committees, like the service committees, probably need not meet more than quarterly. In short, as Exhibit 3 demonstrates, no committee member need have more than 8 meetings a year and no committee chairman more than 16. If one provides committee members and committee chairmen with alternates, these numbers could be halved.

The price in terms of additional effort appears to be slight -- especially in light of the potential benefits. The matrix would appear to be ideally suited for the purpose of realizing the Object of Rotary as encouraging our goal of service above self and simultaneously strengthening our fellowship with one another. By adopting the matrix concept we build bridges of friendship among ourselves -- a first step in building bridges of friendship throughout our world. The final result is a Rotary that is shared and peoples who are served.

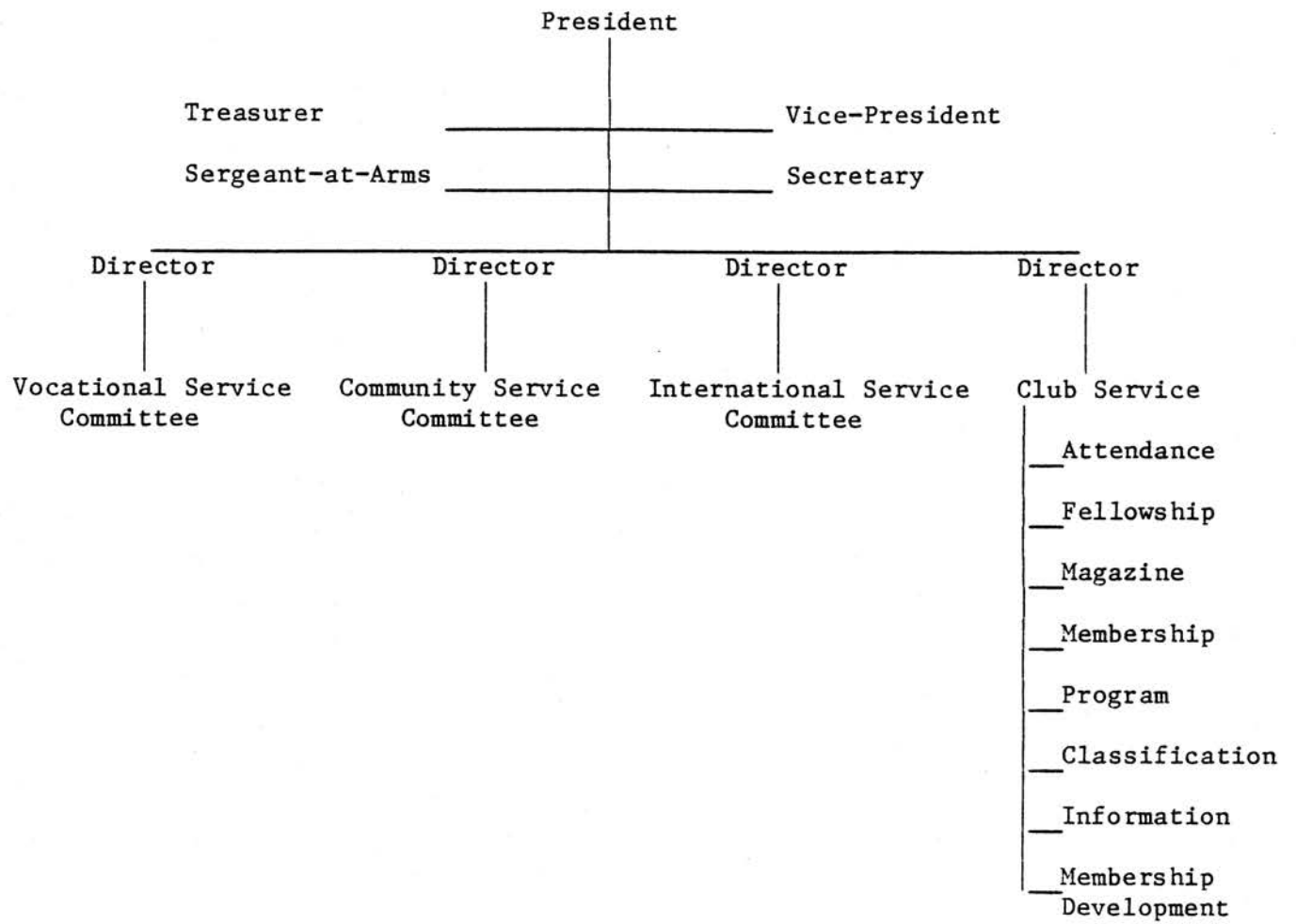


Exhibit 1. Divisional Structure

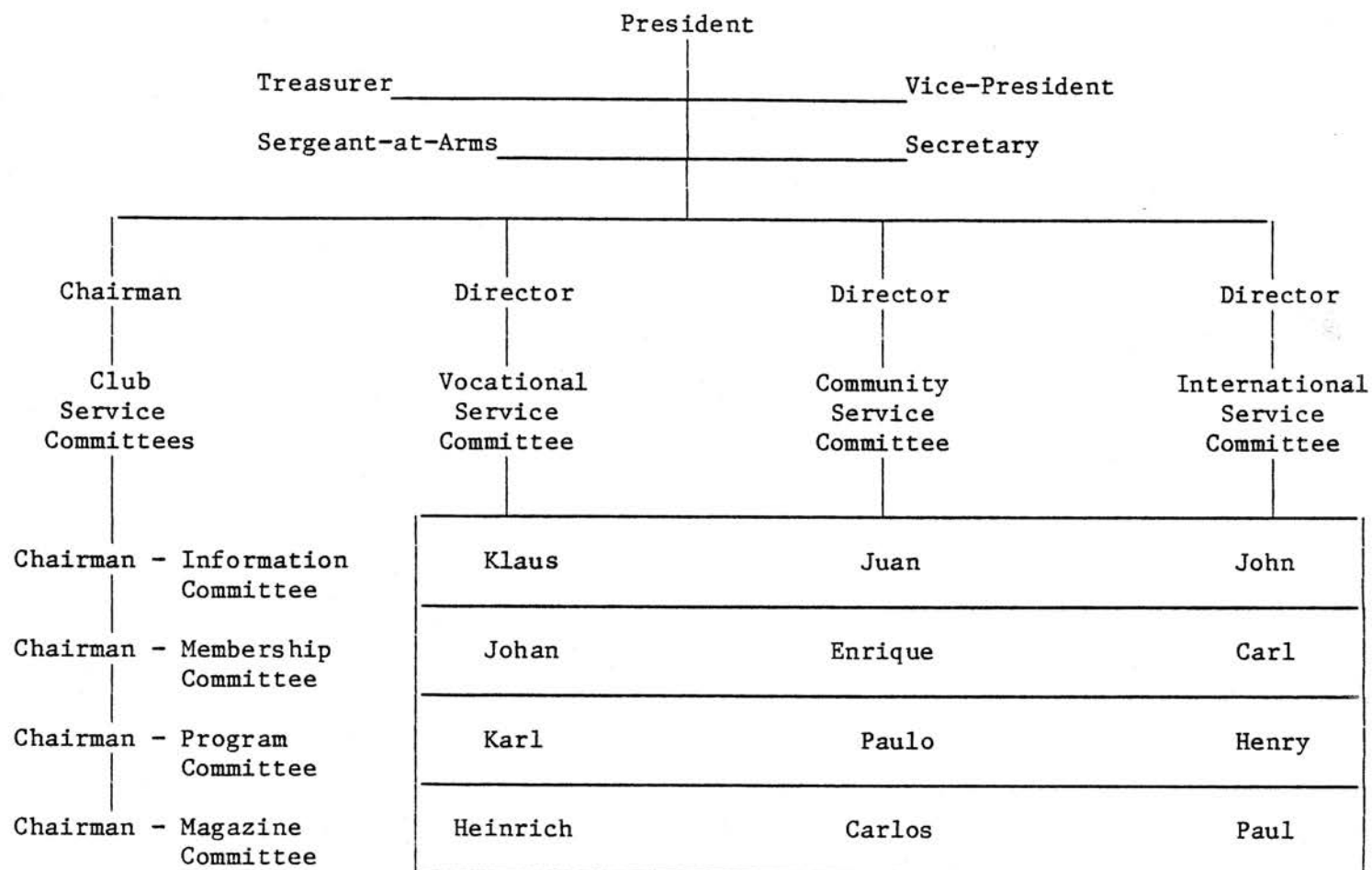


Exhibit 2. Matrix Structure

	July	August	September	October	November	December
Board	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Club Service	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vocational	✓			✓		
Community		✓			✓	
International			✓			✓
Information		✓				✓
Membership			✓	✓		
Program	✓				✓	

Exhibit 3. Illustration of Meeting Schedule

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